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'Married' to the military : The experiences of partners of Australian Defence Force members

Ngaere B. Stewart
Edith Cowan University

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Running Head: EXPERIENCES OF PARTNERS OF ADF MEMBERS

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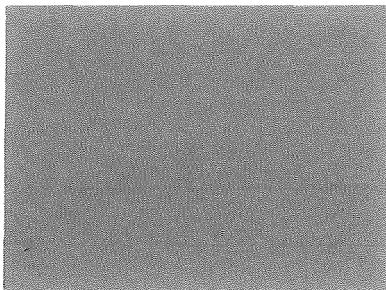
Ngaere B. Stewart

A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of
Bachelor of Science (Psychology) Honours,
Faculty of Community Studies, Education and Social Sciences,
Edith Cowan University

October 2004

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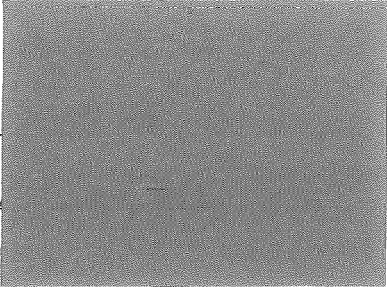


Declaration

I certify that this literature review and research project does not incorporate, without acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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**‘Married’ to the Military: The Experiences of Partners of Australian Defence Force
Members**

Ngaere B. Stewart

Abstract

This paper provides a review of the literature in order to understand the experiences of the partners of Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel. A brief overview of the early research in this area sets the context for a review of the demands of the ADF lifestyle, such as geographic mobility and lengthy operational separations from the ADF member. Military-related injuries and illness is another demand of the ADF that is also discussed. These demands are then examined within a theoretical framework of incorporation theory; the work/family fit and the family life cycle models. The overall satisfaction of ADF partners with the ADF lifestyle, and the family support policies of the Australian government are briefly outlined. Finally, the limitations of past research in this area are discussed.

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Introduction

Recent media coverage of Australia's involvement in military conflicts overseas have contributed to raised public awareness of the stressful conditions of service faced by members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). In addition to the stress of the battle itself, non-combat military life can also be very demanding (Benötsch, et al. 2000; Foreman, 2000; Paton, 2003). The ADF exerts a great deal of control over ADF members, and this control extends into their personal and family lives. For example, the demands of the ADF lifestyle typically include periodical geographical relocations, lengthy separations from family and friends, and long, unpredictable working hours (Bull, 1999; Cotton, 2001). Thus, the demands of the ADF can have a large impact on the partners of ADF members and their families.

Civilian partners of ADF members (ADF partners) are subject to many of the stressors of non-combat military life that ADF members are subject to, yet they have other unique challenges to deal with. Similar to Defence Force members, ADF partners are required to relocate within Australia, and occasionally outside of Australia. However, unlike Defence Force members, ADF partners are often required to find employment in the new locality (Cotton, 2001). Other aspects of non-combat military life include long separations from their partner, reduction to single parent status, diminution of social support from family, and loss of social and professional ties (e.g. Foreman, 2001; Hodge, 1997; Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2004).

Past studies in this area have identified that although the demands that are imposed on ADF partners can produce positive experiences; they more frequently yield negative experiences (e.g., Foreman, 2001; Jans, 1988; Snider, 1994). Unfortunately, most of the literature investigating the experiences of partners of Defence Force members originates from the United States of America. Moreover, the

few Australian studies investigating this issue typically focus on the effect of a particular demand or combination of demands of service life on ADF personnel and/or their families.

This paper reviews past and current literature in this area in order to identify the experiences of ADF partners. The review will focus predominantly on Australian literature. However, due to the paucity of relevant Australian literature in this area, American and British studies will also be reviewed. The paper will begin with a brief outline of the early research in this area, followed by a review of the demands of the military lifestyle on ADF partners and their families. Military-related injuries and illness could also be considered to be a demand of the military lifestyle and will also be discussed. These demands will then be examined within a theoretical framework to assist in understanding the impact that the demands have on ADF families. Finally, the overview of the overall wellbeing of ADF families, and the family support policies of the Australian Government will be reviewed.

Historical Context

The difficulties associated with being the partner of a Defence Force member were first identified in the United States of America in the 1960's. Based on clinical observations, Isay (1968, p. 647) described the 'Submariner's Wives Syndrome' as the 'depressive illness' that afflicts the partner of a submariner shortly before, or immediately after, the return of the submariner from a long sea voyage. Later, Lagrone (1978) identified the 'Military Family Syndrome', which included military families characterized by a high prevalence of behavioural disorders and delinquent children (Lagrone, 1978).

Many US studies that have attempted to address the 'Military Family Syndrome' have found that children from military families are not characterized by

long-term psychological problems (Jensen, Lewis, & Xenakis, 1986; Jensen, Xenakis, Wolf, & Bain, 1991; Morrison, 1981). A study conducted by Morrison (1981) found that there were no differences between children from military families and non-military families on most measures of psychiatric illness. In fact, children from military families were less likely to develop delusional illnesses than other children. In another study conducted by Eastman, Archer and Ball (1990), it was found that US Navy families were found to be functioning at a healthy, adaptive level, comparable to most civilian families. Similarly, several Australian studies have found that the psychological wellbeing of children from military families does not significantly differ from that of non-military families (Kaczmarek & Cowie, 2003; Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2003)

While it appears that the 'Military Family Syndrome' has been discounted, (Eastman, et al.; Jensen, Xenakis, Wolf, & Bain, 1991) there is some evidence to suggest that military families have a higher proportion of health related problems, compared to a non-defence population (Snider, 1994). According to the results of this Australian study, children from ADF families were more likely to suffer from asthma/bronchitis (17.2%) compared to children from non-defence families (9.9%). The partners of ADF members were more likely to suffer from back problems, hay fever/sinus problems, and arthritis than their non-military counterparts (Snider, 1994).

To date, most of the Australian research that has been conducted in this area since problems were first identified has been sponsored by the Australian Government to inform their ADF family support policies. In this way, the Government can identify the main problems that face ADF partners and their families, and implement family support policies to lessen the impact. The long-term purpose of these support policies is not so much to support the families, but rather to address issues of retention of ADF

members. Certainly, family issues are important factors that contribute to the decision of ADF members to discharge from the ADF (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2004).

Like most policy reform, important or catastrophic events highlight the need for inquiries, research, and/or changes in government policy. Thus, military family research is largely linked to the impact of moments in military history such as the Vietnam War and the Gulf War (Evans, McHugh, Hopwood, & Watt, 2003; Sim et al., 2003). The strategic restructuring of the ADF, which involves the relocation of troops to Northern Australia, also serves as a catalyst for research on the impact of relocation on ADF families. Thus, it is against this political backdrop that family research investigating the demands of the military lifestyle will be discussed.

The Demands of the Military Lifestyle

An important landmark study was conducted in Australia between 1985 and 1986, in order to determine the main problems that faced the partners of ADF personnel (Hamilton, 1986). Geographical relocations were frequently reported as one of the most stressful problems associated with military life. Relocations presented many difficulties, including the diminution of family support, disruptions to children's education, and difficulties finding employment in the new locality (Hamilton, 1986). Other problems associated with military lifestyle include: long separations from deployed partners and the effects of military lifestyle on children.

Postings and Geographic Mobility

The geographic relocation (posting) of ADF members and their families to different parts of Australia is necessary to maintain the operational effectiveness of the ADF (Anderson, 1997). ADF personnel are relocated in order to replace personnel who leave the ADF, for training purposes, and for career development (Anderson, 1997). However, the high frequency of geographic relocations (posting turbulence) is often

seen as being disruptive (ADF Posting Turbulence Review Team, 2001). According to the Australian Defence Force Census, (2003) most ADF families (53%) experienced between one and four relocations, over a quarter (27%) of military families were required to relocate between five and nine times, and 7% of families endured between 10-14 relocations during the ADF member's period of service. These statistics seem very high, given that the average length of military service is less than 10 years (ADF Census, 2003).

The experience of geographical relocation can be both positive and negative. Travelling to different parts of Australia can be exciting, but there are also many penalties associated with moving (Jans, 1988; Snider, 1994). Indeed, the entire process of uprooting and moving to a new area can be stressful, (Moyles & Parkes, 1999) and the stress tends to increase according to the number of prior moves experienced (Martin, 1995). Although most military families eventually adjust well to relocations, there appears to be a consistent pattern of lowered family adjustment in the first year after the move (Orthner, 2002).

The penalties associated with moving are well documented (Bull, 1999; Hamilton, 1986; Snider, 1994). In addition to the damages that can occur to furniture and belongings (Hodge, 1997), hassles such as selling property during the relocation process can be stressful (Munton, 1990). The financial impact of geographic mobility can also be burdensome (Black, 1993, Hamilton, 1986). Whilst the ADF meets the costs associated with moving household possessions, and provides a *travel allowance* (PACMAN, 2005), there are many other expenses associated with moving. For example, the costs associated with reconnecting telephones, electricity, etc. can all add up (Hamilton, 1986). A *disturbance allowance* is paid to compensate for these costs, and it is calculated according to the number of prior moves (PACMAN, 2005). It is not

known whether this adequately compensates for the financial and psychological costs of moving.

The financial difficulties associated with moving are often compounded by the ADF partners' difficulty securing suitable employment in the new locality. On average, ADF partners were out of work after their last relocation for almost six months (Australian Defence Force Census, 2003). Delays or problems in finding new employment can often be attributed to the limited career opportunities that are offered in many isolated posting destinations (Hamilton, 1986). Instability of residence (Jans, 1988) or discrimination by employers (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2004) can also make it difficult to obtain employment.

In the long term, this impacts on the development of satisfactory career prospects for ADF partners. Changing jobs every few years makes it very difficult for ADF partners to establish a satisfying career (Jans, 1988). More than half of ADF partners experience a drop in income when they eventually resume working (Australian Defence Force Census, 2003), and many ADF partners do not bother seeking employment at all because they believe that they will not be in the area long enough to make it worthwhile (Snider, 1994).

The process of moving can also have an impact on social wellbeing. Moving to a new area often involves leaving behind family and friends, and this can result in feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Black, 1993; Cross, 1988; Hamilton, 1986; Snider, 1994). According to the Defence Force Census, (1999) over 80% of ADF partners lived more than 100 km away from their parents. Thus, new support networks and friendships must be cultivated in each new location. New relationships must also be formed with health professionals, teachers, church groups, sporting groups and so on (Bull, 1999). As Hamilton (1986) discovered, ADF partners often feel that it is not

worth the effort to form new relationships, only to relocate soon afterwards and lose them.

The Effects of Geographic Mobility on Children

The impact of geographic mobility on children is one of the most frequently reported concerns associated with the military lifestyle (Hamilton, 1986; Jans & Fraser-Jans, 1989; Kaczmarek, & Cowie, 2003). A study conducted by Kaczmarek and Cowie (2003) found that while parents perceived that relocations were stressful for children, the experience also acted to strengthen children, and helped them to mature faster. On the other hand, parents have also reported that relocations can be very disruptive for children, particularly when they are young (Jans & Fraser-Jans, 1989). Finkel, Kelley, and Ashby (2003) found that children who lived in the same residence for longer periods of time reported better relationships with their peers and less loneliness. However, this effect appears to be mediated by the quality of the child's relationship with their parents (Finkel et al., 2003).

The effect of geographic mobility on children's education is also a major source of stress and concern for parents (Hamilton, 1986; Jans & Fraser-Jans, 1989; Kaczmarek, & Cowie, 2003; Snider, 1994). Parental fears that geographic mobility can have an adverse impact on their children's academic achievement appear to be well founded (Mantzicopoulos & Knutson, 2000; Mehana & Reynolds, 2004; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). A longitudinal study conducted by Weiss (2001) in the USA examined the effect of changes and disruptions (turbulence) on academic achievement during the first year of high school. Results indicated that higher levels of turbulence were significantly related to poorer grades. However, it was not clear what mechanisms underlying turbulence specifically contributed to lower academic achievement.

Rumberger and Larson (1998) examined student mobility between the eighth and twelfth grades and its effect on high school completion. After controlling for factors such as low socio-economic status and academic achievement, results indicated that students who made one or more school changes between the eighth and twelfth grades were twice as likely not to complete high school as students who did not change schools. However, despite controlling for confounding variables, these results do not imply that mobility *causes* school dropout.

Taken together, these studies suggest that geographic mobility is risk factor for lower academic achievement and high school dropout (Mantzicopoulos & Knutson, 2000; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Weiss, 2001). Of course, these studies were conducted outside of Australia, so caution must be exercised in generalizing these results to Australian children from military families. However, the consequences of geographic mobility on the education of children from ADF families are often all too clear. ADF parents frequently reported that their children have been required to repeat a grade, or they are put down a grade in school (Personnel Policy Strategy Review Team, 1995).

Lengthy Operational Separations

Another particularly demanding aspect of the military lifestyle is that the ADF member is frequently required to leave the family home for long periods of time to attend training courses or operational deployments (Black, 1993; Foreman, 2001; Hamilton, 1986). These often-lengthy separations can be very demanding on ADF partners, who are expected to 'keep the home fires burning'. Operational separations effectively eliminate daily interactions and physical contact with absent partners, and if they are parents, it imposes sole-parenting responsibilities upon them (Foreman, 2001; Glisson, Melton & Roggow, 1980; Ursano, Holloway, Jones, Rodriguez, &

Belenky, 1989). As a result, ADF partners frequently report feeling lonely, isolated, and overwhelmingly sad and depressed (Foreman, 2001; Siebler, 2003; Snider, 1994).

Many studies have found that operational separations have a negative impact on the wellbeing of the partners of defence force members (Beckman, Marsella & Finney, 1979; Jensen, Martin & Watanabe, 1996; Morrison & Clements, 1997; Orthner & Rose, 2003; Wood, Scarville, & Gravino, 1995). An American study conducted by Kelley (1994) used self-report measures to examine the impact of a six-month deployment to the Persian Gulf on the adjustment of Navy personnel's partners. Results showed that the partners of US Navy personnel reported a significantly higher rate of depressive behaviours prior to, and during the deployment, compared to after the defence force member had returned home.

Similar findings were obtained in a study conducted by Nice (1983). Depression levels of the partners of deployed US Navy personnel were measured using the 40-item Mood Questionnaire (see Ryman, Biersner, & La Rocco, 1974), and compared to the depression levels of the partners of non-deployed US Navy personnel. Results indicated that depression levels in partners of deployed personnel were significantly higher than the depression levels of non-deployed personnel (Nice, 1983). Despite the good design of this study, the large attrition rate (28/59) resulted in a small sample size (31), and there is some danger generalizing these results. Nevertheless, similar findings were also obtained in a study of the partners of deployed naval submariners conducted by Glisson, Melton, and Roggow (1980).

An Australian study conducted by Foster and Cacioppe (1986) investigated the impact of lengthy operational separations on the partners of merchant sailors. Similar to military personnel, seafarers frequently spend long periods away from home whilst out at sea. It was found that the vast majority of seafarer's partners reported that they

experienced stress while their partner was away at sea, and 8% of partners reported that they required medication to cope with the absence. Again, the relatively small sample size (52), absence of a control group, and the lack of standardized measures means that caution is required when interpreting these results.

In addition to the stress associated with partner absence, operational deployments and peacekeeping missions to troubled and often war-torn countries can be worrisome for ADF partners (Elliot & Scott, 2001; Foreman, 2001). Media coverage of Australian involvement in recent conflicts occurring in the Middle East (Afghanistan, Persian Gulf) has heightened public awareness of the very real danger of injury or death faced by Australian troops who are deployed into these areas. Deployments and peacekeeping missions can result in a terribly stressful experience for Defence Force partners, as they worry about the safety of their loved one (Elliot & Scott, 2001; Schumm, Bell, & Knott, 2001).

Siebler (2001) conducted 44 interviews with ADF members who had been deployed to East Timor in 1999, and their partners who had remained in Australia, in order to investigate their perceptions of ADF support during this time. Although the experiences of ADF partners during the absence were not fully explored in this study, ADF partners did report that the experience was a negative one. A number of ADF partners reported that they were diagnosed with depression during this time. They also reported suffering from intense sadness, tiredness, sleeping problems and crying, and suffered many physical health problems including miscarriages and disorders that required hospitalisation (Siebler, 2003).

The *Weekend Australian Magazine* featured the described experiences of the partners of seven Australian ADF members who were deployed in Iraq (van den Nieuwenhof, 2004). This was a very worrying time for ADF partners; the experience

was described as ‘hellish’ and extremely stressful (van den Nieuwenhof, 2004, p.1). As one ADF partner stated: ‘[the concern was]...always there...tugging at your heart. You just have this silent, daily dread that something can happen. That’s why the [Baghdad] attack really shook us all. It rammed home the danger’ (van den Nieuwenhof, 1994, p.2).

The Effects of Operational separations on Children

There is evidence to suggest that the children of Defence Force members are also adversely affected when their father or mother is absent for long periods due to training or operational deployments (Jensen, Grogan, Xenakis, & Bain, 1989; Kelley, 1994; Ursano et al., 1989). In addition to the lack of nurturance, stability, and parental role modelling from the ADF member whilst they are absent, children are also concerned about the safety of their parent (Blount & Curry, 1992; Ursano et al., 1989). One child explained that she was fearful of her name being called during class, lest teachers were to inform her that her father has passed away (Ursano et al., 1989).

Several studies have investigated the effects of military-induced parental absence on children (e.g. Kelley, 1994; Ursano et al., 1989). Jensen et al. (1996) investigated the responses of 480 children who were separated from a parent due to operations in the Persian Gulf. Results showed that the children of the deployed soldiers demonstrated significantly higher levels of depressive symptomatology as measured by the Children’s Depression Inventory (Kovacs & Beck, 1977) when compared to children whose parent had not deployed. Another study conducted by Jensen, Grogan, Xenakis, and Bain (1989) also reported very similar findings some years earlier.

Kelley (1994) examined the effects of military-induced parental absence on the behaviour of children. Achenbach and Edelbrock’s (1983) Child Behaviour

Checklist was used to measure children's internalising (e.g. fearful, inhibited behaviours) and externalising behaviours (e.g. aggressive, antisocial behaviours) before, during and after the absence. Mothers reported that children exhibited internalising and externalising behaviours before and during the absence, but these diminished when the parent returned home. However, when a parent was deployed during a war situation; these behaviours did not diminish over time (Kelley, 1994). Unfortunately, due to the absence of a control group, it is not known whether these levels of misbehaviour significantly differ from children of non-deployed parents.

The majority of literature investigating the effects of military-induced separation shows that the experience is emotionally unpleasant for ADF partners, and parental absence results in negative experiences for children. These negative experiences appear to escalate when these absences correspond with deployment to hostile war zones. Thus, it appears that military-induced operational separation constitutes a risk to the psychological wellbeing of both ADF partners and their children during this time.

Military-related Injuries and Illness

The very nature of military service carries with it the high risk of injury, illness or even death. Most salient is the physical and emotional injury or death that can result from operational and peacekeeping missions to war-affected nations. Less obvious are the non-combat health risks associated with military service. For example, many Royal Australian Air Force personnel who worked to re-seal the fuel tanks of F1-11 aircraft developed adverse symptoms (e.g. gastro-intestinal problems, headaches, loss of memory) due to their exposure to the hazardous substances (ADF, 2004). Such illness and injury results in negative experiences for afflicted ADF members, and also impacts on the quality of life of the ADF member and their family.

Although both combat and non-combat related injuries and illness impact upon ADF partners, combat-related injuries have been more widely researched and will be discussed here.

The Gulf War Syndrome

The high prevalence of physical and psychological problems suffered by Defence Force personnel who served in the Persian Gulf in 1991 have been taken as evidence of a *Gulf War Syndrome* (Everitt, Ismail, & Wessely, 2002; Haley, Kurt & Hom, 1997; Hotopf, Hull, Nikalaou, Unwin, & Wessely, 2004). However, there is no consensus regarding a definition of the syndrome, and it is also unclear whether the syndrome results from the psychological effects of war, immunisations, or due to exposure to toxic substances whilst in the Persian Gulf (Chalder et al., 2001; Haley et al., 1997; Sim et al., 2003). Indeed, the very existence of the Gulf War Syndrome has come under attack (e.g. Bieliauskas & Turner, 2000; Ferguson & Cassaday, 1999).

In response to the suggestion of a Gulf War Syndrome, an Australian study was conducted to assess the health of 1,588 members of the ADF who served in the Persian Gulf (Sim et al., 2003). Although the study did not support recent suggestions of a Gulf war syndrome, many adverse health outcomes were found. The most striking health finding in this study was the high prevalence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) found in Gulf war veterans compared to other members of the ADF and the wider community. Gulf war veterans were also significantly more likely to suffer from a range of psychological problems, general health problems, and substance abuse than comparison groups (Sim et al., 2003).

Poor health outcomes in war veterans are not limited to the recent Gulf war. Indeed, health problems in war veterans that have been documented after other modern wars (Jones et al., 2002; Verbosky & Ryan, 1988). Harrex, Horsley, Jelfs, van

der Hoek, and Wilson (2003) found significantly higher mortality rates in Australian Korean war veterans compared to the wider population. Similar findings were obtained in an Australian sample of Vietnam veterans (Crane, Barnard, Horseley, & Adena, 1997). In another Australian study, Ward (1997) found a significantly higher prevalence of PTSD and general poor health in Cambodian war veterans compared to the general population. Australian Vietnam veterans were also significantly more likely to suffer from PTSD than the wider Australian population (O'Toole, Marshall, Schureck, & Dobson, 1999). Thus, research shows that effect of war per se has an adverse impact on the health and wellbeing of ADF members, particularly in relation to PTSD.

The Impact of PTSD on ADF Partners: Lessons from Vietnam

The most common and pervasive psychological injury of military combat and war is PTSD, and it has been documented that PTSD can have very adverse effects on family functioning (Bleich & Solomon, 2004; Department of Veterans' Affairs, 1999; Evans et al., 2003; Jordan, Marmar & Fairbank, 1992). What little is known about the effects of PTSD on defence force families has been documented in American and Australian studies on Vietnam veterans.

Several American studies have investigated the impact of PTSD on families. Carroll, Rueger, Foy, and Donahoe, (1985) found that Vietnam veterans suffering from PTSD were found to be less self-disclosing and less communicative towards their partners compared to those without PTSD. They were also more likely to display hostile and physically aggressive behaviours towards members of their family. Similarly, Jordan et al. (1992) found that Vietnam veterans with PTSD were more likely to report relationship problems, parenting problems, and poorer family adjustment than veterans without the disorder. The partners of Vietnam veterans with

PTSD reported higher levels of unhappiness, life dissatisfaction, and demoralization. Moreover, long term relationships involving Vietnam veterans with PTSD were significantly shorter in duration compared to those without PTSD.

Several Australian studies have also investigated the impact of PTSD on family functioning. Evans et al. (2003) found that Australian Vietnam veterans suffering from PTSD were depressed, and avoidant and aggressive towards their partners, which contributed towards relationship problems. In another study, Verbosky and Ryan (1988) found that ADF partners of Vietnam Veterans reported high levels of stress in attempting to cope with their partner's symptoms, and verbalized feelings of anger, isolation, worthlessness and low self-esteem. However, a lack of standardized measures and control groups in this study make it difficult to assess the gravity of these problems.

Taken altogether, it is clear that war and military conflict can have devastating effects on the health and wellbeing of ADF members, and this can also impact heavily on their families. The disorder can be damaging to relationships, and living with a person with PTSD can have a negative impact on personal happiness and wellbeing. Unfortunately, apart from PTSD, there is little research investigating the impact of other types of combat-related illness and injury. However, the available literature shows that combat related injury and illness is another demanding aspect of the ADF lifestyle that requires closer scrutiny.

Theoretical Framework

The experiences of ADF partners and their families may be more easily understood when the demands of the ADF are examined within a theoretical framework. This process is especially valuable given that very few studies in this area apply a theoretical framework to the demands of the military lifestyle to understand the impact that they have on ADF partners and their families.

It may be useful to describe the manner in which the demands of the ADF extend into the private realm of the family and impact upon the family's way of life as 'incorporation' (Callan, 1984; Finch, 1983). Incorporation is used to describe the overlap between work and family life (Finch, 1983). This can occur when one's occupation imposes a 'set of structures' upon the life of his/her partner affecting freedom of life choices (Finch, 1983, p.2). Certainly, aspects of the ADF lifestyle impose many demands, which affect freedom of life choices. For example, strategic restructuring of the ADF requires geographical relocation, which affects freedom to choose where to live.

More recently, research based on Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) work/family conflict theory show that the demands of work could interfere with the demands of family life (Adams, King & King, 1996; Frye & Breaugh, 2004; Hughes, Galinsky & Morris, 1992; Matthews, Conger & Wickrama, 1996; Voydanoff, 2004). Work/family fit refers to the level of comfort associated with the balance of work demands that are made upon both the worker and his/her family (Pittman, 1994). The military often upsets the balance between work and family, due to the heavy demands that are placed on Defence Force members and their families (Jessup, 1996; Pittman, 1994).

The impact of incorporation or work/family fit may be exacerbated by the family's location within the family life cycle. Family life cycle refers to a series of stages that the family navigates, ranging from stage one (couple without children) through to stage six (couple with children) to stage eight (children leave household) (Duvall, 1977). The theory states that there are 'basic family tasks' to be carried out for healthy family functioning and survival, such as socialization, support, and economic provision (Duvall, 1977, p.176). Aspects of the ADF lifestyle could cause

family difficulties according to this model. For example, partner absence could impact upon the provision of socialization and support for the family.

These theories are useful in identifying how work related influences could affect military families and their lifestyle, and how change within the families may mediate these influences. Assuming the level of control meted out by the ADF acts to incorporate the partners and families of enlisted members, this impinges upon the freedom of life choices, and upsets the work/family balance. The extent to which this may occur could reflect the family's position within the family life cycle. For example, a family with young children may be greater affected by geographic mobility than a couple without children. Thus, these theories provide a useful framework for understanding the experiences of ADF partners in relation to the hardships and demands of the military lifestyle.

The application of this theoretical framework to the military lifestyle can aid in understanding the levels of stress experienced by ADF partners and their families. For example, ADF requirements often dictate that ADF members will work long and unpredictable hours, particularly during field exercises (Cotton, 2001). This not only impinges upon the ADF member's amount of quality time with their families, but also restricts the freedom for educational, occupational and social pursuits of ADF partners, particularly if they have children (Jessup, 1996). Thus, long and unpredictable work hours are often associated with lowered relationship quality and marital conflict (Demerouti, Geurts, Bakker, & Euwema, 2004; Voydanoff, 2004; Weston, Qu & Soriano, 2002). This theoretical framework could also apply to the other demands such as relocation, operational separation, and military-related illness and injury.

Of course, there is very little research that has been conducted to assess the applicability of the theoretical framework described above when applied to the demands of the ADF lifestyle (but see Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2003; Murphy, 1991). However, ADF partners have expressed frustration at the perceived lack of control that they possess over their own lives (Hamilton, 1986). Moreover, ADF partners report that they perceive that the demands of the ADF are given a higher priority than the needs of ADF families (Murphy, 1991).

Satisfaction with the Military Lifestyle

Overall, despite all of the demands and hardships of the military lifestyle, military families do not appear to be unhappy and dissatisfied (Glisson, et al., 1980; Jensen, Lewis, & Xenakis, 1986; Ursano et al., 1989). Surprisingly, American research indicates that relationship satisfaction does not appear to decline as a function of the demands of military service (Angrist & Johnson, 2000; Schumm, Bell, Knott & Rice, 1996; Schumm, Bell, & Gade, 2000; Schumm, Hemesath, Bell, Palmer-Johnson, & Elig, 1996). However, combat-related service does appear to have a negative impact on relationship quality (Gimbel & Booth, 1994).

It appears that only one Australian study has investigated the overall satisfaction of ADF partners. As part of an Australian study that was conducted by Snider (1994), 1,262 ADF partners were surveyed on their satisfaction with the military lifestyle. Overall, it was found that 48% of partners were satisfied with service life, 40% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 12% were dissatisfied (Snider, 1994). While these statistics do not appear to be high, it does appear that the divorce rate in the ADF is rising (ADF Census, 1999; ADF Census, 2003). Moreover, these statistics might reflect the real possibility that unsatisfied ADF families are leaving the ADF and thereby placing their family life ahead of potential career stability. Certainly, high resignation

and low retention is a problem of great concern for the ADF (ADF Posting Turbulence Review Team, 2001).

Family Support Policies of the Australian Government

The Australian Government has implemented many family support policies to help ADF families with the demands and hardships of the military lifestyle. Unfortunately, due to the operational and training requirements of the ADF, greater posting stability and less frequent operational separations is not a reality (Personnel Policy Strategy Review Team, 1995). However, the ADF has undergone many changes in relation to family support policies. The first changes came in response to the recommendations of the *Hamilton Report* (1986). A tri-service organisation; *Australian Defence Families and Information Liaison Staff* was formed in 1987 to assist single-service family support organisations in providing advice and assistance to ADF families. However, Pratt (1994) found that these support groups were not operating effectively due to inconsistency, lack of flexibility, and a disproportionate division of resources between each of the armed services of the ADF.

As a result, the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) came into existence in 1996 (Anderson, 1997). DCO delivers a wide range of services to ADF families, including social work, family liaison, and education liaison support services (Anderson, 1997). Most ADF families report that the services provided by DCO are invaluable, however many believed that DCO did not understand what ADF families were going through (Siebler, 2003). Moreover, many families do not utilize many of the services provided by DCO due to lack of awareness of their existence (Snider, 1994; Waller, 2003). Other services such as remote locality leave travel and the availability of holiday accommodation are helpful, but they only partially deal with the problems (Personnel

Policy Strategy Review Team, 1995). Unfortunately, it has been a number of years since the effectiveness of current family support policies has been reviewed.

Limitations of Past Research

Overall, there is a distinct lack of research investigating the experiences of ADF partners. In particular, Australian research in this area is very limited, and non-government (non-military) sponsored studies investigating this issue are particularly scarce (but see Kaczmarek & Cowie, 2003; Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2004). Although the research that has been conducted outside of Australia is more plentiful, it is also relatively limited, is often dated, and frequently suffers from poor research design and methodology. Moreover, generalizing results from American and British populations to Australian populations is always fraught with difficulty due to different operational and societal conditions. Given the gravity of the issues identified in this review, there is a pressing need for more Australian research to be conducted in this area.

There are several areas in particular that need further research. The lack of Australian research investigating the impact of military-induced operational separations makes conclusions in this area difficult. There are also many methodological problems in most of the studies in this area. Moreover, the research in this area focuses mainly on the experiences of the partners of Navy personnel, and neglects the experiences of the partners of Army and Air Force members. Although military-induced separations in the Army and Air force may be similar in many ways to those in the Navy, there are likely to be subtle differences, particularly surrounding deployments and exposure to combat.

Another area that needs further research is the experiences of the partners of ADF members who have served in recent military conflicts. Apart from PTSD, there is also very little research on the impact of other injuries or illnesses (or death) that results from combat. The effect of non-combat illness and injury on ADF members and their

families has also been neglected. Finally, research that investigates the applicability of the theoretical framework used in this paper to assist in understanding the experiences of ADF partners and their families would also be valuable, as this would provide the key to understanding periods of increased stress and difficulty for ADF partners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that the ADF imposes many unique demands on ADF members. Although the presence of a military family syndrome has been discounted, there are many demands associated with the military lifestyle that could cause a great deal of stress. Many of these demands, such as periodical operational relocations and separations, impact heavily on ADF partners. Arguably, these demands are very intrusive and are likely to exceed the work/family balance. Moreover, these demands have been shown to impact children in unique ways. Thus, experiences of ADF families appear to be influenced by the location of the family within the family life cycle. Other hardships associated with the military lifestyle include military-related injury and illness, and particularly PTSD, has also been shown to impact negatively on ADF partners.

The overall satisfaction of ADF partners in relation to the military lifestyle is not clear due to the lack of Australian research. However, it appears that although most ADF partners are satisfied, a number of ADF partners are dissatisfied with the military lifestyle. In response, Australian government policies have come a long way in addressing some of the problems associated with the military lifestyle, but there appears to be a lot of room for improvement. Further studies investigating the experiences of ADF partners and the effectiveness of government support for ADF families will help identify areas that need to be addressed.

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‘Married’ to the Military: Exploring the Experiences of Partners of Australian
Defence Force Members

Ngaere B. Stewart

Abstract

The partners of Australian Defence Force (ADF) members are exposed to many unique challenges, such as geographic mobility and lengthy operational separations from the ADF member. This study explores the experiences and tensions of the partners of ADF members through qualitative, in-depth interviews. The principles of grounded theory were used to guide the collection and analysis of data. A theoretical framework of incorporation theory, social constructionist theory, work/family fit and the family life cycle model was used to aid in understanding the experiences of the partners of ADF members. Data analysis of 10 interviews revealed three broad areas of difficulty for ADF members, including: Operational Separation, Relocations, and the Socially Constructed Expectations of the ADF and Australian Society. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications for future directions.

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Introduction

It is becoming increasingly well known that, in addition to combat, non-combat life is also stressful for Defence Force members (Benotsch, Brailey, Vasterling, Uddo, Constans & Sutker, 2000; Foreman, 2001; Paton, 2003). The Australian Defence Force (ADF) is structured in such a way that it commands a great deal of control over Defence Force members, which extends into their personal lives. Geographic mobility and lengthy operational deployments are but two of the demands associated with the ADF lifestyle. These demands impinge upon the personal lives of ADF members, and they also affect the private lives of their partners and family members.

ADF partners (civilian partners of ADF members who have no previous association with the military) are subject to many of the same stressors associated with non-combat military lifestyles that ADF members are subject to (such as geographic relocation), yet they also have many unique challenges to contend with. For example, ADF partners experience long separations from their partner due to deployment or other defence requirements, worry about the safety of their partner during operational deployments, and they are often reduced to single parent status while the ADF member is absent (Foreman, 2001; Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2004).

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of a military lifestyle on ADF partners, in order to further understand the experiences and tensions of ADF partners and their families.

Literature Review

Most of the previous research examining the experiences of ADF partners has been conducted in the United States of America (Finkel, Kelley & Ashby, 2003; Kelley, 1994; Wood, Scarville & Gravino, 1995). It is surprising that there are

relatively few Australian studies in this area, given the impact of this issue on both military families and retention rates. Since the ADF counted 50,670 Defence Force members in the 2003 Defence Census¹, and identified that 58% of these were married or involved in a recognised Defacto relationship,² it is clear that these issues can affect a sizable population.

The available research in this area suggests that the military lifestyle can present many challenges and difficulties for ADF partners (Jans, 1988; Hamilton, 1986; Snider, 1994). An early Australian study conducted by Hamilton (1986) found that geographical mobility was one of the most stressful problems associated with military life. Relocations presented many difficulties, including the diminution of family support and disruptions to children's education (Hamilton, 1986; Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2004).

Other problems associated with geographic mobility include damage to furniture and belongings during removals (Hodge, 1997), and the loss of social and professional ties (Bull, 1999). There are also many financial costs associated with geographic mobility, such as reconnecting telephones, electricity and so on (Black, 1993, Hamilton, 1986). This is often compounded by problems obtaining employment in the new locality due to employer discrimination, or lack of career opportunities in isolated posting destinations (Hamilton, 1986).

Frequent separations from the serving member due to operational deployments can be a demanding characteristic of the military lifestyle (Hamilton, 1986; Glisson,

¹ Australian Defence Census 2003 was conducted on 18 March, 2003 by the Department of Defence to provide a demographic profile upon which to base strategic plans and policy. Public report available online: <http://www.defence.gov.au/dpe/defencecensus2003/reports.htm>

² According to the ADF, a defacto relationship refers to a couple that live together as husband and wife on a genuine domestic basis, and this relationship is formally recognised by the ADF. Same sex relationships are not recognised in the definitions of relationships in the ADF. ADF Pay and Conditions Manual available online: http://www.defence.gov.au/dpe/pac/76/8910_1.html

Melton, & Roggow, 1980; Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2004; Murphy, 1991; Ursano, Holloway, Jones, Rodriguez, & Belenky, 1989). Based on Peebles-Kleiger's (1994) Stages of Deployment model, De Soir (2004) describes the stages that ADF partners negotiate during lengthy partner absences. Initially, the shock of impending deployment creates an emotional numbing and withdrawal. Departure is characterized by sadness and despair, and is gradually supplanted through order and routine. Upon reunion, the re-establishment of intimacy and the re-integration of the ADF member back into the family can also be challenging. Parental absence also can have a negative effect on children, particularly in relation to their schooling (Jans, 1988; Jensen, Grogan, Xenakis, & Bain, 1989; Kelley, 1994; Ursano et al., 1989).

The impact of operational separations can have adverse effects on the physical and mental health of ADF partners. An Australian study conducted by Siebler (2001) found that a number of ADF partners reported that they were diagnosed with depression while their partners were deployed to East Timor. Many reported suffering from intense sadness, tiredness, sleeping problems and crying, and suffered many physical health problems including miscarriages and disorders that required hospitalisation (Siebler, 2003).

There is some evidence to suggest that military families have a higher proportion of health related problems, compared to a non-defence population (Snider, 1994). The results of an Australian study conducted by Snider (1994) found that the partners of ADF members were more likely to suffer from back problems, hay fever/sinus problems, and arthritis than their non-military counterparts (Snider, 1994). Children from ADF families were more likely to suffer from asthma/bronchitis compared to children from non-defence families.

A recent Australian study conducted by Kaczmarek and Cowie (2003) examined the psychosocial wellbeing of 23 military children and families, compared to a civilian sample. While this study did not find any significant differences in psychosocial functioning between these two groups, qualitative interviews with parents revealed many issues, including problems associated with geographical mobility, school disruption, parental absence, family functioning, and neighbourhood cohesion. It was concluded that there were many unique stressors associated with the military lifestyle, but these were unable to be pinpointed using quantitative methods.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is based on incorporation theory (Callan, 1981; Finch, 1983), work/family conflict theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), family life cycle theory (Duvall, 1977) and social constructivism (Gergen, 2003).

The manner in which the demands of the ADF extend into the private realm of the family and affect ADF partners can usefully be described as ‘incorporation’ (Callan, 1984; Finch, 1983). The term ‘incorporation’ is used to describe the overlap between work and family life, and it occurs when one’s occupation imposes a ‘set of structures’ upon his/her partner affecting freedom of life choices (Finch, 1983, p.2). The ADF imposes many demands on ADF partners, affecting the freedom to make life choices. For example, the strategic restructuring of the ADF results in the geographical relocation of ADF families. Compulsory geographic relocation restricts freedom to choose where to live.

Incorporation also refers to the partner’s indirect contributions to an organisation in the form of domestic and child rearing duties (Finch, 1983). The ADF indirectly benefits from the domestic labour and child rearing duties that ADF

partners perform when their partner is away. For example, ADF partners often shoulder the domestic chores and adopt sole child rearing responsibilities whilst ADF members are away from home. In short, ADF partners enable the ADF member to carry out ADF requirements.

Unfortunately, these ADF demands can often conflict with the demands of the family. Recent research based on Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) work/family conflict theory show that excessive work demands interfere with the demands of family life (Adams, King & King, 1996; Frye & Breugh, 2004; Hughes, Galinsky & Morris, 1992; Matthews, Conger & Wickrama, 1996). Work/family fit refers to the level of comfort associated with the balance of work demands that are made upon both the worker and his/her family (Pittman, 1994). The military often upsets the balance between work and family (Jessup, 1996; Pittman, 1994). For example, geographic relocation might be viewed as an excessive occupational demand, which opposes the family's needs for stability.

The impact of incorporation or work/family fit may be exacerbated by the family's location within the family life cycle. Family life cycle refers to a series of stages that the family navigates, ranging from stage one (couple without children) through to stage six (couple with children) to stage eight (children leave household) (Duvall, 1977). The demands of the ADF are likely to affect families in different stages of the family lifecycle in various ways. For example, a family with young children may be greater affected by geographic mobility than a couple without children.

The ADF's expectation for ADF partners to provide support is inherent in the newsletters that the ADF distributes to ADF partners (Appendix A). Social Constructionist theory can help to explain where the social expectation to fulfil this

role originated. According to the Social Constructionist position, our understandings of the world are the ‘products of historically situated interchanges among people’ (Gergen, 2003, p. 15). In terms of the family, people portray themselves and their family members in a manner that is consistent with their understanding of the dominant public norms of family life (Bradley, 1989). Thus, as long as the ADF community and society at large continue to endorse the role that ADF partners fulfil, they are likely to continue to act in accordance with this norm.

The origins of the assignment of this role to ADF partners is likely to stem from the traditional patriarchal structures present in Australian society (see Bradley, 1989). Patriarchy is a concept that is difficult to define, but commonly refers to male dominance, including social dominance and male exploitation of women’s labour (Bradley, 1989). Until challenged by the women’s rights movement in the mid 19th century, the socially acceptable role of women was one of household labour and childrearing (Erickson, 2005). However, the traditional norm of male-as-breadwinner and female-as-homemaker remains socially acceptable in Australia. The ADF certainly has a vested interest in retaining the traditional male-breadwinner model.

This theoretical framework informs the methodological approach that is used to explore the research question: What is the experience of being the partner of an ADF member?

Methodology

Research Design

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative research design was utilized to unearth the meaning of phenomena from the perspectives of ADF partners. Qualitative research designs preserve the richness of the data, retain associated contextual aspects, and maximises opportunities for identifying underlying concepts

(Miles & Huberman, 1994). Moreover, the flexibility of qualitative methods is particularly agreeable to study within the complex realm of the family (Daly, 1992).

A Grounded theory approach was adopted in this study in order to allow the issues and themes to emerge freely from the data. In this way, interpretation of the results is not constrained by preconceived theory, but rather, a theory is allowed to evolve over the course of data collection (Charmaz, 2000; Miles, 1983; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Participants

Ten adult females were recruited to participate in this study, and are shown in Table 1. Females were selected because the ADF consists of a disproportionately higher number of male members, and therefore these issues were expected to affect a greater number of female partners than male partners. The number of participants was not predetermined, as interviews were conducted until the point of saturation (further new ideas or information could not be found) (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Saturation occurred after 10 interviews. All participants were non-Indigenous, English-speaking Australians, aged between 21-51, with a mean age of 33.8 years. Six participants were recruited through personal contacts located within military establishments using a combination of snowballing techniques and purposive sampling. Four participants responded to an advertisement in *Defence Family Matters* (Appendix B).

Table 1.

Details of participants, relationship details, and number of children living at home.

Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Relationship Length	Service	Children (at home)
Alice	25	Homemaker	3 yrs	Army	1, pregnant
Amy	21	Retail	18mths	Army	pregnant
Rebecca	29	Homemaker	9 yrs	Army	2
Jasmine	28	Clerical	3.5 yrs	Army	1
Jessica	37	Homemaker	3.5 yrs	Navy	3
Jennifer	49	Management	27 yrs	Army	0 (adults)
Emily	34	Homemaker	5.5 yrs	Navy	3
Rachelle	51	Volunteer	19 yrs	RAAF	4
Anne	34	Homemaker	12.5 yrs	Army	2
Michelle	30	Homemaker	10 yrs	Army	2

Data Collection

Data was collected over a 10-week period, averaging approximately one interview per week. Data was collected through a series of semi structured, in-depth interviews, which varied in length from 45 minutes to 90 minutes. Semi structured interviews are valuable in gaining additional information, and for developing rapport (Berg, 2001). In-depth interviewing is useful for this type of research design as it enables the researcher to explore the participant's experience of reality, and reduces the risk of the researcher imposing his or her own constructions of reality onto the participant (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1990).

Interviews were conducted in a conversation style format, loosely in accordance with the interview schedule shown in Appendix C. However, the interviews were flexible in order to allow the narrative to influence the direction of the interview, and to accommodate the evolving theory of the researcher (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open-ended questions were asked, such as: 'What is it like to be the partner of an ADF member?'

Ethics

Ethical issues such as confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent were addressed before every interview, and occasionally reiterated as necessary during and after the interview. All identifying information (such as names of people referred to) was removed or coded during the transcription process.

Data Analysis

In order to derive meanings from the interviews, the interview data was reduced through the use of thematic content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The aim of thematic content analysis is data reduction, through the conceptualisation of phenomenon, and the comparison and categorization of these concepts into themes. It was expected that these themes would broadly encapsulate the experiences of the partners of ADF members.

The transcripts were read and comprehensively examined several times in order to become intimately familiar with the data. Meanings were coded, and reoccurring patterns were pattern coded, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). Memos were utilised in order to record ideas and help make sense of the 'bigger picture' (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Pattern-coded concepts derived from the data were extracted and displayed simultaneously on a large display board, where they were compared and categorised. Similar concepts were clustered together, and common issues began to emerge.

The issues were entered into a Thematic Display Matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The rows of the matrix consisted of questions designed to organise and extract the key experiences of the partners of ADF members (Appendix D). The columns initially consisted of Relocations, Separations and Other Issues. The percentage of participants who mentioned a particular issue was documented in order to determine

the prevalence of the issue, and to improve credibility. Analysis of the Thematic Matrix showed distinct groupings of issues, which clearly defined and supported the themes that emerged.

Issues that were extricated from each individual transcript were mailed to all participants, and in several cases they were discussed with participants, as a means of member checking the accuracy of the researcher's emerging themes. All participants indicated their agreement with the researcher's interpretations. Regular peer debriefing and the verification of the findings through two independent reviews of the findings was also conducted.

Findings and Interpretations

An analysis of the experiences of this small sample of ADF partners revealed three superordinate themes: Operational Separation, Relocations, and Socially Constructed Expectations.

Operational Separation

Operational Separation was a theme that emerged as one of the most troubling and frequently reported problems associated with the military lifestyle. In fact, 80% of women interviewed considered that Operational Separations were a very difficult and challenging time. Three main issues associated with Operational Separations included: Sole responsibility, Emotional turmoil, and Family disruption.

Sole responsibility

Most women revealed that one of the most difficult problems that these women faced during lengthy separations was the assumption of sole responsibility for the day-to-day running of the house. Similar to the findings obtained by Glisson et al. (1980) and Murphy (1991), these women explained that they were forced to undertake sole-parenting responsibilities, pay bills and manage financial matters, and organise medical and school appointments for the children when their partner was absent. "You

go to being a single parent, basically, you just do everything yourself. You are so tired by the time they come home, but it is a case of: you just need to do it" (Anne). It was frequently mentioned that things often go wrong while their partner is away, and they are left to deal with these problems without the support of their partner. One woman explained that while her partner was away, the ceiling in her house fell inwards:

It is funny though, because always something goes wrong. The first time, the freezer and the fridge blew up one time when he was away [laughs]. The second time, I smashed the car, the third time, he rang up and he said to me: 'What have you done this time?' ...And I went: 'Nothing!' [Laughs]. '...Nothing! But hypothetically speaking, ...would you want, would you want the fireplace back into the house if the roof fell in?' (Emily).

Emotional Turmoil

The emotional turmoil identified in this study is consistent with the Emotional Stages of Deployment model (see De Soir, 2004). Participants in the current study reported feeling depressed and sad when their partner deployed for long periods of time. Many women also reported feeling lonely and socially isolated when their partner was away. One woman stated that she felt "*really lonely inside*" (Alice), and others reported that they missed the daily conversation and social interaction with their partners. One ADF partner explained that after her children had gone to bed in the evenings, she did not open her mouth to speak another word until the next morning. Most women try not to dwell on the problem, and other try to keep busy:

I don't know why I thought I could cope with this, because it is just horrible, it is just horrible, sitting there, sitting on your own, night after night, which is why I study, because it takes my mind off it (Emily).

Women were often worried that changes that had occurred in the family that would not receive the approval of their partners when they returned home. For example, one participant was worried that her husband would not approve of her weight gain, and several women worried that their partner might not feel the same way about her when he returned. One partner confessed that she had worried that her partner would be unfaithful while he was away. This finding is consistent with the preparation for homecoming stage in Emotional Stages of Deployment model (see De Soir, 2004).

ADF partners were also very worried and concerned about the safety of their partner while he was away on deployment. As one partner stated: *“it’s a war, they could die! Stuff like that can really mess with your head, you know”* (Amy). The experience can be very emotional, as Anne explained:

You just become a little mushroom and sit in the corner and don’t take in any information, you just, if you get really upset you just ring the social worker and have a little chat with them and cry down the phone at them or whatever, um, you just try to keep it together for the kids so that they don’t get upset, because they don’t need that...(Anne).

Most women tended to rationalize the danger and console themselves with the knowledge that *“he is trained for it, you know, its his job, that’s the nature of his job”* (Jennifer). However, media coverage of the deployments often increased their concern, and lack of understanding from family and friends can also make it difficult:

He has been away on a couple of deployments, the unknown, the shock, and what I find really hard is family and friends that aren’t Defence, they have no idea. They say the most stupid things. And they have no understanding of what you are

really going through. Yeah, no, it is very scary. And I guess you just block a lot of it out...(Rebecca).

Previous studies have identified that lengthy operational separations have adverse effects on self-esteem and depression levels of the partners of military personnel (Elliot & Scott, 2001; Glisson et al., 1980; Siebler, 2003). However, problem areas associated with operational separations (such as worry about partner safety) have largely been neglected. Nevertheless, these findings are similar to those obtained by Murphy (1991) in relation to loneliness and social isolation.

Family disruption

Difficulties associated with reunion were frequently reported as a challenge associated with separations. This finding is also consistent with the Emotional Stages of Deployment model (De Soir, 2004). Consistent with the model, women explained that when their partner goes away, the family goes through a transition phase as they get used to him not being there. When their partner returns home, the family goes through another transition period as they readjust to him being home again:

There have been times when he has been away, and then he comes home for one or two weeks, and he goes again. And sometimes you think it would be easier if he didn't come home at all, because it is disruptive. (Rebecca).

Several women explained that they get into a routine, and when their partner returns home, he disrupts this routine. The ADF member sometimes has difficulty settling back into the family routine, and this can cause tension:

You get to a point where you get into such a routine that when your partner does come home, he's in the way of your routine kind of thing, especially when he goes away for long stints- four weeks or so at a time. He'll come home and he just,

messes up your routine completely, they'll decide they may want to come home and say: 'oh no, I want to spend time with...[our son] at this time' and it is like: 'no, we are in a routine, please don't mess it up'... (Alice).

Many women reported the negative impact that separations have on the children. Mothers worried that their partners were missing important milestones in their children's development, and important events, such as birthdays. Concern that children were losing their attachment with their father was also frequently mentioned. After a long absence, young children often did not recognise their father, as one ADF partner explained:

When he was younger, it took...[my son] a couple of days to get used to...[my partner] again, he would go away for a period of time, and when he came home...[my son] wouldn't know who he was (Jasmine).

This is consistent with the previous literature that has identified the negative affect of partner absence on children (Jensen, Grogan, Xenakis, & Bain, 1989; Kaczmarek & Cowie, 2003; Kelley, 1994; Ursano et al., 1989). Most women explained that they attempted to lessen the impact of parental separation on the children by regularly speaking to the children about their father, showing them photographs, playing recordings of his voice, even planning a big party for his homecoming. Despite this, one ADF partner explained that her child's behaviour regresses when her partner goes away:

When...[my partner] does go away...[my son's] personality changes, he stops eating his food, he will go from, like, he was fully potty trained, to going straight, you know, having accidents all the time, and having to be put back in nappies,

going from this happy little boy, contented, to this cranky...little monster overnight, his personality changes, his routines change... (Alice).

Relocations

Relocations were also frequently reported as one of the most challenging aspect of the ADF lifestyle. While several women stated that the travel associated with relocations was positive, the experience of relocation was predominantly portrayed as negative. The main issues to emerge under this theme included Social Isolation, Removals, and Employment and Schooling.

Social isolation

Moving away from family and friends was the most frequently reported challenge associated with relocations. Most women described moving to a new area as a socially isolating experience. *"Sometimes it gets a bit hard because you feel isolated, especially when you first get here, you don't know anybody"* (Anne). Several women mentioned that they did not have the support of their families, and were unable to go out alone with their partner (to the movies, dinner etc) because they did not have their family and friends close by to care for the children. Furthermore, instead of helping each other during this challenging time, several women mentioned that other ADF partners could often be 'bitchy' and 'competitive'. This can make it difficult to adjust:

I felt a bit isolated then, because I had only really made contact with one person, another Navy wife, that was just the luck of the draw, because I have found that in some places it's like, almost like: 'well, we had to find out everything for ourselves, and so do you.' A lot of, a lot of defence people will go out of their way to help you avoid pitfalls that they found when they arrived. Others will sort of go: 'Oh, we'll see how well YOU do' (Jessica).

These findings are very consistent with previous studies that have identified that the relocation process can be a very isolating experience for ADF partners (Bull, 1999; Hamilton, 1986; Snider, 1994; Hodge, 1997). Kaczmarek and Cowie (2003) obtained similar findings in relation to problems with the culture of the defence neighbourhood. However, these authors found that such problems were usually due to misconceptions held by non-defence families, rather than problems between defence families.

Removals

The process of moving was also frequently mentioned as a stressful part of the ADF lifestyle. Several women were required to manage the entire removal process on their own. One partner explained that she had to unpack everything by herself while she was pregnant, because her partner was required to go out to sea. Many women were angry and frustrated at the number of breakages that occurred to their belongings, which was usually attributed to: “...*the carelessness of the removalists. Always, something is broken...*” (Rachelle). There was some frustration over unsuccessful attempts to gain adequate compensation for the breakages. Overall, the whole process of moving was described as ‘frustrating’, ‘tiring’ and ‘emotional’. The following narrative appears to encapsulate the experience of the removal process:

Earlier on we had a few breakages, so it was like ‘Oh’ [sighs]. And yeah, and sorting out the paperwork, and all of that sort of thing, and trying to find out what he wanted me to do with various things, and all that...but I mean, they are just obstacles that you get over because you have just got to, but at the time, it is like: ‘Oh! [Big sigh]. Could it be any worse? Could it possibly get any worse than this?’ (Jessica).

Employment and Schooling

A number of women revealed that they had experienced problems obtaining suitable employment in the new locality. Problems such as employer discrimination, frequent partner absences and lack of contacts in the area were cited as reasons for these difficulties. *“So basically, I haven’t worked for the last two and a half years because it is just not possible, so that would probably be the other thing about posting, a bit of a drawback thing”* (Anne). Problems obtaining employment in the new locality is consistent with the findings of previous studies in this area (Hamilton, 1986; Jans, 1988; Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2004).

The effect of relocations on the children was mixed. Often, children were opposed to the move, because they did not want to leave family and friends. One partner recalls her child’s reaction to the move: *“I don’t want to be here, I want to be back there, because school is horrible”* (Jessica). Conversely, some women mentioned that relocations had a positive effect on their children by broadening their horizons. *“[The children]...have a much more, tolerance, of the underprivileged in the Northern Territory”* (Jennifer). Most women with school age children revealed that relocations had an adverse effect on their children’s education:

We have been swapping and changing schools for the kids, the kids have had four changes, they have lost their friends, it affected the four oldest children because they were older, and [I had been] sitting with them and talking to them, helping them get through the transition (Rachelle).

Kaczmarek and Cowie (2003) also found mixed results regarding the impact of relocation on children. Similarly, their finding that relocations had a perceived negative impact on the education of children was also replicated in this study. Overall,

these results are consistent with the Family Life Cycle theory, as families with young children appear to be greater affected by geographic mobility than couples without children.

Socially Constructed Expectations

A theme that echoed through all of these women's stories was the socially constructed expectations of ADF members and their partners. It is evident that the ADF implicitly expects the support of ADF partners. "*Life does tend to revolve around what the Navy want him [my partner] to do*" (Emily). Many women seemed to accept that their support was crucial in their partner's career development: "*They already told us that [the next posting is] ...a full-on job. I was like: phew! I can do it again, it will be good for his career*" (Michelle). However, a number of women resented the fact that the demands of the ADF always seem to come before the demands of the family:

Most people seem to be of the opinion that the partner should come first, the marriage should come first, the kids should come first. If you are married to a military man, the job really does come first (Rachelle).

It was highly apparent throughout the interviews that the demands of the ADF often conflict with the demands of the family. This is consistent with Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) work/family conflict theory. The ADF has certain expectations of ADF members (i.e. to deploy), yet ADF partners also have expectations of their partners (i.e. to assist in childrearing). Thus, these expectations can often conflict. One ADF partner verbalized this disparity:

Once they have been in [the ADF] for a certain amount of time, they reach a certain age, in their 30's, they have partners, they have children, and when they

joined up they were 18, 19, and it was: 'join the Navy, see the world, fantastic' and then they have other demands pulling them in the other direction (Jessica).

It was also apparent that the application of the authoritarian power that the ADF holds indicates a socially constructed assumption that ADF members are the 'property' of the ADF. Problems identified such as long working hours, being on call 24 hours a day, and short notice deployments are probably necessary to enable the ADF to rapidly respond to military threats and engagements. However, other uses of this power do not appear to facilitate these requirements. For example, one woman stated that the ADF inflicts financial punishments on ADF members for small military offences (such as being eight minutes late for work). These fines affect the financial wellbeing of the ADF member's family. *"Little niggly things like that I don't like, you know, like taking the guys' pay off them. There are lots of other ways they could punish them"* (Michelle).

A novel finding in this study was the dissatisfaction at the quantity of alcohol consumed by ADF members. It was frequently mentioned that the ADF encourages the consumption of alcohol, and this is distressing and frustrating for many ADF members. As one partner explained, *"...that's one bad thing about the Army. They encourage drinking. Really, really bad. And they encourage the 'blokey' behaviour"* (Michelle). It is often a *"requirement of the job"* (Jessica) to attend social functions, and these events always seem to involve large quantities of alcohol. One ADF partner revealed that her partner suffers from alcoholism.

ADF Family Support

While a couple of women believed that social support services provided by the ADF families were inadequate, most women felt that the availability of these services was reassuring. However, a majority of women were reluctant to utilize these support

services (such as counselling) lest they were labelled as weak or unable to cope. Other services and conditions, such as subsidised rental accommodation, medical benefits, job security and travel allowances were rated as highly beneficial.

Overall Satisfaction

Overall, none the women involved in the study were dissatisfied with being the partner of a member of the ADF. Most women revealed that they were generally quite happy and satisfied. Overall, the ADF lifestyle was described as; ‘occasionally frustrating,’ and ‘a lot of work,’ but ‘enjoyable.’ A number of women reported that their partner’s career satisfaction was the most rewarding aspect of the military lifestyle. Many women revealed that they would continue to support their partner as long as their partner enjoyed his work. Generally, most women revealed that there were both positive and negative aspects of the ADF lifestyle, but “...*a lot of the time, when we weigh up the pros and cons, sometimes the pros shine through*” (Rebecca).

Conclusion

This study was designed to further understand the experiences and tensions of ADF partners and their families. A series of semi-structured interviews unearthed several themes, which broadly encapsulate the experiences of ADF partners. These themes included Operational Separation, Relocations, and Socially Constructed Expectations.

The application of the theoretical framework employed in this study to these results can assist in understanding the experiences of ADF partners. Many of the ADF demands imposed on ADF families act to Incorporate ADF partners, because they restrict the freedom of the family, and they indirectly benefit the ADF. For example, ADF partners assume the domestic responsibilities when their partner is sent away on

operational deployments. This benefits the ADF by enabling ADF members to deploy. However, such demands appear to exceed the work/family balance. For example, most participants in the current study believed that the tendency of the ADF to place its own needs over the needs of the families was excessive. The family life cycle also affects the magnitude of such problems faced by ADF partners. For example, demands such as geographic relocation appear to affect the social wellbeing and education of children.

There were several limitations of the current study. The small number of participants requires caution in transferring these results to the ADF population. However, despite the small sample size, the results were very consistent with the literature. There may also be an element of self-selection bias in the sample. Since several participants responded to advertisements, it is possible that these women did so because they had pressing issues that they wished to express. However, since none of the women in the study were dissatisfied with the ADF lifestyle, they were probably not motivated by an intense dissatisfaction with the conditions of the ADF.

It is possible that the interpretation of data was subject to researcher bias. The researcher was previously a fulltime member of the ADF, and the civilian partner of an ADF member at the time of the study. It was recognised that this previous military experience might taint interpretation of the findings. Thus, potential biases were managed through documentation of biases throughout data collection and interpretation, and conclusions were verification by non-involved parties. However, the researcher's previous military experience is also beneficial, as it helped to establish rapport with the participants.

Finally, all of the participants in the current study were females who were involved in a relationship with a non-commissioned officer. Results might have

differed if the sample included the partners of commissioned officers. Similarly, results might have varied if the male partner of female ADF members, or couples who were both ADF members were included in the sample.

Several important issues were raised that have implications for further research and ADF policy. It is clear that geographic relocations and frequent partner absence remain problematic for ADF partners. While it is recognised that this is necessary to enable the ADF to fulfil its role, steps can be taken to lessen the impact. For example, ensuring that the ADF members is available to help their partner to unpack their household possessions after a move will help ease the pressure of relocations for ADF partners. The possibility of conducting training courses within home units should also be explored to reduce partner absence. Finally, the level of social support provided by the ADF appears to be inadequate and under-utilised by ADF partners. The reasons behind the reluctance to use these support services needs to be further explored.

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Guidelines for Contributions by Authors: Research Report

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Manuscripts may be in the form of: (i) regular articles (between 5,000 and 10,000 words); or, (ii) short reports for rapid publication (not exceeding 2,000 words); or, (iii) personal accounts for the 'Voices' section (not exceeding 2,000 words). Four complete copies and an electronic version on a floppy disk should be submitted to: The Editors, *Community, Work & Family*, Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Elizabeth Gaskell Campus, Hathersage Road, Manchester M13 0JA, UK. Email: cwf@mmu.ac.uk. Authors in North America should send their manuscripts to The Editors, *Community, Work & Family*, Boston University, School of Social Work, 264 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215, USA.

All submissions should be in the style of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (4th edition, 1994). Papers should be typed on one side of the paper, double spaced throughout (including the references), with margins of at least 2.5 cm (1 inch). All pages must be numbered. The first page should include the title of the paper, first name, middle initial(s) and last name of the author(s), and for each author a short institutional address, and an abbreviated title (for running headlines within the article). At the bottom of the page give the full name and address (including telephone and fax numbers and e-mail address if possible) of the author to whom all correspondence (including proofs) should be sent. The second page should repeat the title and contain an abstract in English of not more than 200 words. Authors are invited to submit additional abstracts in French and Spanish. The third page should repeat the title as a heading to the main body of the text. The text should normally be divided into sections with appropriate headings and subheadings. Within the text section headings and subheadings should be typed on a separate line without numbering, indentation or bold or italic typeface.

References should follow American Psychological Association style. All publications cited in the text should be listed following the text; similarly, all references listed

must be mentioned in the text. Within the text references should be denoted by the author's name and year of publication in parentheses, e.g. (Lambert, 1993) or (Mansell & McGill, 1995), or, if there are more than two authors (Gallico *et al.*, 1986). Where several references are quoted consecutively within the text the order should be alphabetical, e.g. (Elford & Sherr, 1989; Folkman, 1992). Similarly, where several references are quoted within a single year, the order should be alphabetical (Mansell & McGill, 1995; Woods, 1995). If more than one paper from the same author(s) and year is listed, the date should be followed by (a), (b) etc., e.g. (Blazer, 1995a). References should be listed at the end of the paper in alphabetical order, typed in double spacing. Responsibility for the references and their verification against the original documents lies with the author(s).

References should be listed on a separate sheet(s) in the following standard form, capitalisation and punctuation: 1. *for periodical articles* (titles of journals should not be abbreviated): Lambert, S. (1993). Workplace policies as social policy. *Social Service Review*, 67, 237-260. 2. *for books*: Norman, A. (1987). *Aspects of ageism*. London: Centre for Policy on Ageing. 3. *for chapters* within multi-authored books: Lewis, S. & Kagan, C. (1995). Children: dual career families. In M. Moore, J. Sixsmith & K. Knowles (Eds.), *Children's perspectives on family life* (pp. 29-51). Brighton: Falmer Press.

Units of Measurement

All measurements must be cited in SI units.

Illustrations

All illustrations (including photographs, graphs and diagrams) should be referred to as Figures and their position indicated in the text (e.g. Fig. 3). Each should be submitted on a separate sheet of paper, numbered on the back with Figure number (Arabic numerals) and the title of the paper. The captions of all figures should be submitted on a separate sheet, should include keys to symbols, and should make interpretation possible without reference to the text. Figures should ideally be professionally drawn and should be capable of reduction.

Tables should be submitted on separate sheets, numbered in Arabic numerals, and their position indicated in the text (e.g. Table 1). Each table should have a short, self-explanatory title. Vertical rules should not be used to separate columns. Units should appear in parentheses in the column heading but not in the body of the table. Any explanatory notes should be given as a footnote at the bottom of the table.

Appendix A.
ADF newsletter

SASR Family Information Update

I would like to start by saying thank you to all the families for your support this year. As you know, SASR is centred on the principle of having a classless sense of family and that doesn't mean just the soldiers; it includes the partners and children of the Regiment.

SASR is currently operating at a high tempo with operational deployments occurring more regularly than they have in the past. The days of operational deployments being a novelty are gone and the Unit and the families are now becoming more familiar with this routine.

In recognition of frequent deployments being normal business, SASR will commence a series of Partner Information Nights starting with our first regular scheduled meeting on **Tuesday 20th September at 7.00 pm at the Sergeants Mess**. The intent will be to update families on the current state of affairs within the Unit and to provide a focal point for some of our support agencies and to give information on how they can help the SASR family.

The meetings are not only for families whose members are deployed but also for those who are on courses and in Barracks. These regular meetings will provide families the opportunity to interact and gain a better understanding of the Unit itself and what the available support agencies can do to help. A quick explanation of some of those support agencies is provided over the page.

Representatives from the Regiment and support agencies including DCO will be there to provide briefs and answer any questions you may have. Light refreshments will be served. If you wish to attend the next Information Night, please RSVP by phone to Renee on 9285 6602 by the 15th of September 2005. It is requested that you advise the number and ages of children if you require baby sitting at the Mess.

This year has been a particularly busy one and the success that SASR has and continues to have is shared amongst the soldiers and their families. You play a critical part in making SASR one of the finest military Units in the world – we appreciate your ongoing commitment and look forward to seeing you on the 20th of September at the SAS Sergeants Mess.



Bruce Willis
Major
Regimental Executive Officer

Appendix B.
Advertisement

Research project: Partners of ADF members

My name is Ngaere Stewart, and I am studying 4th year Psychology (Honours) at Edith Cowan University. I am conducting a research project that aims to investigate the experiences of the partners of Australian Defence Force (ADF) Members. The study will involve interviews, which will take approx. 45 minutes.

I am looking for females who are married or involved in a defacto relationship with a member of the ADF, and have been involved in this relationship for no more than five years. You will not have had any previous association with the ADF prior to this relationship (Defence Force Reserves excepted).

If you would like to participate in this study, please contact me (my name is pronounced Nar-ree) on (08) 9203 6839 or 0433469441.

Appendix C.
Interview Schedule

Questions:

I would like to start by asking you what it is like to be the partner of a member of the Australian Defence Force?

- What do you find to be challenging?
- What do you find to be rewarding?

How have your expectations of being involved with a member of the ADF been met or not met?

- Do you think you were prepared for life with an ADF member?
- Do you think you/your lifestyle has changed since you became a partner of an ADF member?

How is your partner's job similar to and different from other occupations?

Is your partner intending to make the military a long-term career choice?

- If so, why?
- If not, why not?
- Do you support this decision?

How would you describe your family life?

Has your partner been deployed in Australia or overseas?

- How did this affect you (and the children)?
- What was the reunion like?

Appendix D:
Thematic Display Matrix.

Questions	Relocations	Separations	Social Construction
What are problems?	Social isolation x7 Logistics moving, inventories, organising x4 Removalists do not respect belongings Breakages x2 Kids: change schools: education Kids: social isolation Kids: probs making new friends x2 Kids: don't want to move x2 Differences between states Unpacking/organising removal on own x3 Starting over Uncertain where will be in future x2 No family support in new posting x4 Employment issues after move x3 No stability	He goes away too much x6 Things go wrong when he is away x3 Worry about my partner when deployed x8 Child regresses/child probs while away x4 Full burden of responsibility on own x8 Emotional isolation when partner away x3 Deployment: fear of partner injury x3 Worry that partner miss child develop x2 Disrupts routine when returns x2 Worry family members changed in absence Single parenthood x5 Absence-return: transitions hard x2 Fear partner not have same feelings/weight Worry partner be unfaithful Loneliness when partner away No stability-comes and goes Father a stranger to kids	Defacto is hassle to prove The job comes first x4 Partner always on call 24/7 x2 No notice when partner called away x2 Bitchiness/clicky ADF community x4 Everyone knows your business x2 No control over life x2 Army always changing plans A lot of work ADF support inadequate x2 ADF encourages drinking x5 Life revolves around partners job x3 Punishment of fines affect families Long hours x2 Conflict: demands of ADF and family Resent ADF ADF is a brotherhood
What are positives?	Travel x2 Travel positive effect on kids	More independent x5 Satisfaction being able to cope	They look after you in emergencies Job security x4 Medical benefits ADF support is good to have x4 Partners satisfaction x4 Subsidized rent x2 Proud of partner

Coping strategies		Never rely on partner there	Must support partner x4 Need to be desperate to ask ADF help No choice-don't ask for help x2 Don't revolve life around partner
Overall satisfaction			Overall satisfied but get frustrated Generally rewarding x2 Enjoy it but had enough of moving now Generally happy Want to get more recognition Don't know it any other way There are pros and cons Satisfied now, but wasn't early in marriage Generally satisfied but a lot of work

Appendix E.

Interview Consent Form

Exploring the Experiences of partners ADF members.

I have been provided with, and have read the information letter outlining the research project which aims to explore the experiences of partners of ADF members. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I volunteer to participate in this research and agree to discuss my experiences as the partner of a member of the Australian Defence Force.

I am aware that I may withdraw my participation in the study at any time, without reason and without prejudice.

I understand that the interviews will be audio taped and transcribed.

I understand that any personal information I provide will be treated as strictly confidential, it will only be viewed or listened to by the researcher and the researcher's supervisor, and will not appear in the final report.

I agree that research data obtained from this interview may be published provided that no identifying data is used.

I understand that any future use of the interview data is subject to separate approval by the Edith Cowan University Ethics Committee.

Participant **Date**

Researcher **Date**

All study participants will be provided with a copy of the Information Sheet and Interview Consent Form for their personal records.

Appendix F.

Background Information

Dear Participant,

This background information survey will ensure that the requirements of the study are met. If you are interested in participating in the study, please complete this form and bring it with you to the interview.

Questions:

What is your first name? _____

How old are you? _____

What suburb do you live in? _____

What is your contact number? _____

Do you have paid work outside the home? Please circle one.

Yes Occupation _____

No, I am a homemaker/child rearing duties

Other _____

Do you live in a: Please circle one:

Defence Married Quarter

Own home

Private rental accommodation

Other Please specify _____

Are you: Please circle one:

legally married?

involved in an ADF-recognised defacto relationship?

How long have you been married/defacto? _____

Is your partner: Please circle one:

a member of the Regular Australian Army?

a member of the Regular Australian Navy?

a member of the Regular Australian Air Force?

Which military base does your partner work at? _____

Do you have any children? Please circle one.

Yes **How many?** _____ **How old?** _____

No

Thankyou for completing this Background Information form.